DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 347 522 CS 211 802

AUTHOR Erickson, Barbara Griffiths
TITLE We Can Do--22 Percent Better: Computers and the Writing Process.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 5p.
PUB TYPE Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT Illinois English Bulletin; v76 n3 p35-38 Spr 1989

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Design; *Computer Assisted Instruction; High School Freshmen; High Schools; Program Descriptions; *Program Effectiveness; Revision (Written Composition); Word Processing; Writing Attitudes; Writing Exercises; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Laboratories
IDENTIFIERS *Process Approach (Writing)

ABSTRACT

In the first year of operation, a high school computer writing lab boosted the percentage of freshman passing state-mandated writing tests from 55% to 77%. Two facilitators were employed in the lab and had five major responsibilities: (1) careful organization of the physical facility; (2) training teachers and students; (3) scheduling classes; (4) writing lessons; and (5) handling public relations. Lessons were designed according to the process approach to writing instruction. All teachers agreed that the primary value of writing on computers was the increase in amount and quality of revisions. Students also improved their attitudes about writing as well as their willingness to revise. (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Barbara Erickson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

We Can Do—22 Percent Better: Computers and the Writing Process

BARBARA GRIFFITHS ERICKSON
SPRING WOODS HIGH SCHOOL
HOUSTON, TEXAS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED347522

Said one writing teacher to another:

"I hear we have a new lab of computers for teaching writing."

"Right! How wonderful!"

"It's great to have the latest equipment, but I have never taught writing with computers."

"I haven't either. But the district is going to let us develop our own program. This is our chance to do it our way."

And they did.

At Spring Woods High School in Houston, Texas, two enthusiastic writing teachers were appointed as facilitators of the new Macintosh writing lab. After participating in their successful program, 22 percent more freshmen passed the writing portion of the state mandated tests than the preceding year's freshmen! This success story wants an audience!

Facilitating the Lab

The administrators appointed two facilitators to manage the lab so that each one could handle lab classes one-half day and could teach a regular load one-half day. Although this introduced a significant ongoing cost, it made sense to John Sculley, President of Apple Computers, Inc. He showed that schools having a financial commitment for training had more success with computers (1988). The facilitators' first job required careful organizing of the physical facility, (a special, detailed explanation comes in the next section). Four other responsibilities included training teachers and students, scheduling classes, writing lessons, and handling public relations.

Training was quick and easy because both students and teachers were trained for only twenty minutes, using the commercial Apple program. Teachers were given two hours' release time so the rest of the training taught editing techniques and the capabilities of the text analysis program. Students used their additional time learning editing techniques and then composing a poem about themselves.

CS211502

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Next, for best usage, facilitators learned to schedule class visits every period because this method brought more usage than having teachers sign up for lab time. As the year evolved, the facilitators wrote lessons to meet the writing deficiencies of the students and to implement the writing curriculum. Writing these materials proved the most challenging, yet rewarding responsibility of the directors. After the teachers wrote the lessons, they quickly copied them onto lesson disks for use and gave hard copies to all teachers for consideration.

These disk lessons provided the advantages of low cost, short time requirements to create and to use, and specific targets in focus. Because the lessons were simply typed into the computers using existing word processing programs, they had no hidden software costs. Additionally, they were quick to create since no programming was necessary, and they were also quick for students to complete as the basic composition was already typed for them. For example, many lessons consisted of a faulty paragraph which was typed onto the screen, along with instructions for editing the weaknesses. Finally, the focuses of the lessons reflected the students' weaknesses and were used in response to them. Topics ranged from elaboration to sentence combining and transitions. Other teachers responded by requesting lessons on specific topics.

The last focus of the facilitators was to promote a team spirit and ownership for all teachers using the facility. Working lunches were held, the PTA Newsletter kept the parents abreast of activities, and the lab opened both before and after school so students and teachers could complete assignments for other classes. Facilitators dedicated themselves to this new pilot project.

Organizing the Facilities

Equipment management and lab configuration required immediate action. Carefully, the facilitators designed each work station. Large numerals identified each computer, with the same number identifying software disks to be used at each machine. A sign-in recorded the number of visits and the names of individual users, all possible with a pen provided at each station. Directions for various computer functions were taped on each work surface, and a bright red cup stood ready to be raised by a user in trouble. Mouse pads made of inexpensive table place mats housed each mouse. After each work station was designed and equipped, then labels for each student's data disk were made, indicating student's last name, first initial, teacher, and class period, as **Jackson, J. E-2.** Next, the two attempted several room configurations,

including circular work stations of four units each; but the best arrangement allowed them to see all monitors at once. Nearly finished, the managers placed a bookcase near the lab's entrance for students' books and belongings, keeping the stations uncluttered. Last, an overhead projector was located where all students could see the screen. The lab beckoned the student writers!

Writing the Write Way

That first fall, the typical writing assignment followed this general schedule. Because students were not at ease with computers yet, they brainstormed and wrote rough drafts with the classroom teacher, freeing computers for other users. Students did not compose well on the keyboard until they were familiar with the instrument. The first day in the lab, the students typed their compositions, and printed rough drafts. Facilitators purposely soiled them with a large stamp entitled DRAFT, so that students would not be reluctant to ruin their masterpieces with revisions. Then they ran a text analysis program, circling problem areas on their printed copies. .On day two, the writers completed peer editing back in the regular classroom, and day three they returned to the lab for final revisions and final printing. All teachers agreed that the primary value of writing on computers was the increase in amount and quality of revisions (Collins and Sommers, 1985). Students also improved their attitudes about writing as well as their willingness to revise (Bridwell, 1985). Because papers had fewer spelling, capitalization, and punctuation errors, teachers had more time to evaluate content.

By the second semester, freshmen were competent with the machines so they composed creative poetry at the keyboards, using a variety of fonts, styles, and sizes of prints. These lessons came from packets designed by the facilitators. Even a year later, these same freshmen have come back, asking to check their poems on their disks to make sure they are still there. Talk about ownership!

Still another type of writing activity evolved during this first year of the writing lab—lesson disks as explained earlier under facilitating the lab. Teachers requested and received writing activities to help students with their weaknesses. Even ESL students found the lab valuable for verb writing activities, cause and effect statement writing, and "framed" paragraphs that guaranteed elaboration. With all of these lessons, the focus, of course, was having students write, not simply completing drill and practice exercises (Collins and Sommers, 1985).

Vision, facilitators, teamwork, ownership, the writing process—together they brought success to the freshman pilot project, raising the percentage of successful writers from 55 percent to 77 percent! Teachers at Spring Woods have responded with a resounding, "Sign my classes up for the Writing Lab."

Works Cited

Bridwell, L., Sirc, G., and R. Brooks. "Revising and Computing: Case Studies of Student Writers." In *The Acquisition of Written Language.* Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1985, pp. 172-194.

Collins, James L., and Elizabeth A. Sommers, Ed. *Writing On-Line: Using Computers in the Teaching of Writing.* New Jersey: Boynton/Cook, 1985, pp. 47-53.

Sculley, John. "Tools for the Future." *THE Journal.* Macintosh Special Issue, 1988, pp. 10-12.